IN AN AFTERNOON LIGHT

ON A RECENT AFTERNOON IN PHILADELPHIA, I WALKED TO THE CORner of 63rd and Malvern Streets to catch a number 10 trolley, *my* imaginary streetcar named Desire. Waiting, when I arrived at the stop, was another Black man, sipping a bottle of beer and smoking a cigarette. He wore sunshades and was built three sizes larger than my compact frame. I guessed him to be in his thirties though his pot-belly suggested an older age or the consumption of too much beer and soul food. A blue hand towel was tossed over his right shoulder. A baseball jacket was draped across his left thigh. He was sitting on the wall I sit on when I wait here.

Since there was no trolley in sight, I guardedly walked over and sat at the far end of the wall. He continued to drink his beer as I observed him from the corner of my eye. I pretended to occupy myself with looking for an approaching trolley. He abruptly ended our brief interlude of silence. For no apparent reason he blurted out, "Man, the woman's movement is ruling the world. It's turning our sons into faggots and our men into punks."

"What do you mean?" I asked, raising my voice as loudly as he had raised his. Indignation and defensiveness tinged my vocal chords. I thought his remarks were directed specifically at me.

"You see all the cars going by?" he asked, gesturing at the minor traffic.

"Yeah, so what about it?"

"Well, can't you see that all the drivers in the cars are women—"

"Which only means more women are driving," I interjected.

"—because women have caused major changes in society, brother."

"So?"

"So women are ruling more things now. That's why I don't want my son to spend all his time with his mother, his grandmother, and those aunts of his. His mother and I don't live together, but I go visit him and take him downtown or to the movies or to the Boy's Club. I think that's important, so he'll know the difference."

"The difference in what?"

"The difference between a woman and a man. You know . . ."

"Which is supposed to be determined by what—how they use their sex organs? What I do know, brother, is that 13- and 14-year-old Black children are breeding babies they can't care for—crack babies, AIDS babies, accidental babies, babies that will grow up and inherit their parents' poverty and powerlessness. The truth is young people are fucking because they want to fuck. They're encouraged to fuck. Yet we don't talk to them frankly and honestly about sex, sexuality, or their responsibility."

"Okay brother, hold that thought. You're moving too fast. See, this is what I mean. Suppose you grow up in a home with your father being a minister and your mother is there all the time taking care of the house and kids. You grow up, go off to college and get a good education, then—"

"Yeah—"

"—then you decide you gonna be gay. You like men. I say you learned that. Education did that. Your folks didn't teach you that."

"That's bullshit, and you know it. It's stupid to suggest that women or education can make a man gay. What you fail to understand is that this is the natural diversity of human sexuality no matter what we call it. Also, my father is